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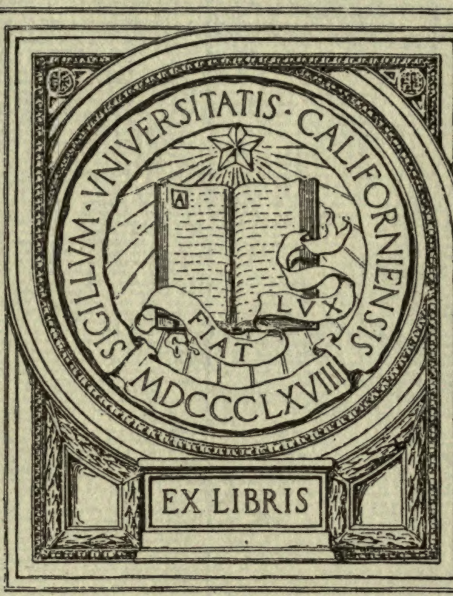
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Charming Léandre: a Comedy in One Act: by Théodore de Banville: Translated by Barrett H. Clark

Samuel French: Publisher
28-30 West Thirty-eighth Street: New York

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THE WORLD'S BEST PLAYS

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BARRETT H. CLARK

GENERAL EDITOR

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CHARMING LEANDRE

PERSONS REPRESENTED

ORGON, an old and crabbed tradesman.

COLOMBINE, his daughter, a pretty and coquettish young woman.

LÉANDRE, COLOMBINE'S lover.

The Scene: Paris, about 1720.

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THEODORE DE BANVILLE

Théodore de Banville (1823–1891) was a poet endowed with delicacy of feeling and charm. His numerous little plays, nearly all in verse, are delightful vignettes of old French life. Nearly always he went to French history, tradition, or literature for his plots. GRINGOIRE, for instance, one of his best known, is a poetic play built round the half-legendary story of the old poet Gringoire; the present sketch, on the other hand, is a purely imaginary trifle, laid in early Eighteenth Century Paris.

As the translation of poetry is practically impossible, it has been deemed wise to cast LE BEAU LÉANDRE in more or less colloquial prose.

The setting is fully described in the stage-directions. The costumes are of the period.

CHARMING LEANDRE

A deserted square in the neighborhood of the Luxembourg Gardens. At the back, through the iron gate, a part of the Palace is seen, half-obscured by heavy foliage. The sides of the stage represent old houses; down-stage on either side are old walls, covered with creeping vines and flowers. Down-stage to the right in ORGON'S *house, style of Louis XV, in red-brick; it has a balcony extending from the French-windows on the second story. Just above this house the garden wall is seen. Down-stage to the left is a marble bench, part of which is broken. The sky begins to brighten, the roofs of the houses are touched with the reflection of the rising sun.*

LÉANDRE *appears at the back, dances about the stage, then stops in front of* ORGON'S *house, looks up at it longingly, then comes down-stage and declaims*:)

LÉANDRE. Cupid, thou it is who hast wakened me at this hour when Aurora tinges with pink the gates of the East. (*Turning toward* ORGON'S *house*) I salute thee, dear abode of the star before which the sun itself seems pale! Dear star of my eyes, sweet and charming Colombine!—Happy Léandre, handsome Léandre, lucky Léandre!—But —marry her? It's a grave question! And she hasn't a sou! Hm!—Let us awaken her! But how? What trick—? Break a window? Sing a song? That very obnoxious old gentleman, Orgon, might come, and pick a quarrel—the devil!

I have it: I'll cry "Fire!" If he appears, I'll run away, but if *she* appears, I shall stay—intoxicated with happiness! (*He goes up-stage and cries "Fire"*) Fire! Help! Help! You'll burn to death!

(COLOMBINE *appears on the balcony.*)

COLOMBINE. Good Heavens, what's all this noise?

LÉANDRE. Fire!

COLOMBINE. (*Catching sight of* LÉANDRE) It's you, Léandre? Where, if you please, is the fire?

LÉANDRE. In my heart! In your eyes! It cannot be extinguished.

COLOMBINE. Flatterer—I do not believe you!—And the wedding—when is it to be?

LÉANDRE. (*Pretending to be in great despair*) Your fatal charms! Ah, heart of snow!

COLOMBINE. When is the wedding day?

LÉANDRE. (*Aside*) She insists!—(*To* COLOMBINE) Thou charming daughter of the Heavens, may it be soon! My intentions are no less pure than the ethereal blue!

COLOMBINE. Then let us get married.

LÉANDRE. (*Standing on the bench in order to speak more easily*) My dear Colombine, the Fates unite to pester people who are married. We have both seen married folk come to fell disaster. Think well!

COLOMBINE. I care not a whit for the Fates—nor for this nonsense you are talking. No marriage—no love!

LÉANDRE. (*Coming down from the bench*) Cruel—let me at least make love to you!

COLOMBINE. I can't trust you!

LÉANDRE. (*Drawing his sword*) My despair will drive me to—I'm going——

COLOMBINE. Ask my father's permission. I like to be clear in matters of this sort.

LÉANDRE. He will refuse!

COLOMBINE. Then I wash my hands of everything. Tell him one of those pretty stories you tell me— Au revoir. (*She retires, closing the window after her.* LÉANDRE *stands for a moment, plunged in uncertainty, then he comes down-stage*)

LÉANDRE. Ah? Well, what if I did marry her, after all? It is indeed serious. I never thought I should go to Cythera's Isle accompanied by two witnesses and a notary!—And yet, Colombine is careful, a good housekeeper, clever—I never knew anyone so industrious. When I look at her as a lover, all's well, but as a husband—hm? Here comes her good father!

(ORGON *comes forth from his house, talking to himself, and not seeing* LÉANDRE.)

ORGON. These confounded clothes! Every motion I make, I burst something—bah! Holes big enough to put one's fist through! Now, how can I manage to replace the material, without paying for it myself? Some friend, some scholar—? (*Catching sight of* LÉANDRE) Ah, Léandre! I'll pretend not to notice him—he gets on my nerves!

LÉANDRE. Salutations, Seigneur Orgon!

ORGON. (*Pretending not to recognize him*) I have no small change—and I never give to the poor.

LÉANDRE. Are you making fun of me?

ORGON. (*As before*) Never. I never give—on week-days or holidays.

LÉANDRE. (*Insisting*) Seigneur Orgon, pray don't be so obstinate. I have come here——

ORGON. Nonsense.

LÉANDRE. To say good morning to you.

ORGON. Rubbish.

LÉANDRE. Only a word——

ORGON. I have nothing to say to you.

LÉANDRE. I must——

ORGON. No!

LÉANDRE. I should have liked——

ORGON. Hush!

LÉANDRE. But let me tell you who I am! I am Léandre!

ORGON. (*Now pretending to recognize him—good-naturedly*) Ah, so it's you, Léandre? My dear Léandre! I must confess, I took you at first for some beggar.

LÉANDRE. Only too happy!

ORGON. What do you want?

LÉANDRE. (*Aside*) I must be pleasant! (*Aloud*) You look particularly well this morning!

ORGON. I look like a man who wants to take a little walk before his own door-step. And you too look remarkably well. Thank you. Good day.

LÉANDRE. (*Catching hold of his arm*) I love a rare and exquisite creature: it brightens the whole earth——

ORGON. (*Trying to get away*) Yes? And what can I do?

LÉANDRE. Her forehead is like the pearls of the sea, her hair is seraphs' gold; not the pearls of paradise can compare with her teeth, the Red Sea is nothing compared with her lips!

ORGON. Then take her to the jeweler's, my dear fellow. If that is true, he will give you a tremendous price.

LÉANDRE. The woman I adore, the woman I—let us be frank—You have a daughter?

ORGON. No. I never had one.

LÉANDRE. Ah, yes you have!

ORGON. No.

LÉANDRE. Yes.

ORGON. No. Now, I must be going!

LÉANDRE. Please don't!

ORGON. I must.

LÉANDRE. You have Colombine.

ORGON. Ah, Colombine! The angel—although she does worry and bother me at times. In this old quarter of the city she keeps house for me: cooks to perfection and mends my clothes. The darling—with her bright eyes, her flowing tresses, I—I declare that she is not for you. I refuse you. And now, run off!

LÉANDRE. (*Kneeling*) My dear Orgon, see: I am kneeling!

ORGON. Stop it! Now be off!

LÉANDRE. Heart of stone, thrice-barbarous father, what have you against me?

ORGON. You are something of a philanderer.

LÉANDRE. Pure affectation on my part!

ORGON. You will be hanged some day.

LÉANDRE. I? By the feet, or the neck?

ORGON. Your escapades are well known.

LÉANDRE. Seigneur, grant me, I beg you, the object of my affections! She will reform me!

ORGON. She is not for you!

LÉANDRE. (*Drawing his sword—tragically*) Thou formidable blade, weapon of my ancestors, bathed in the blood of thousands, protector of innocence, terror of craven hearts, fly quick to the bosom of thy master. Lay the blame for this dark act at Orgon's door. Or if, Oh loyal friend, thou shrinkest from the deed, let me fly for my pistols!

ORGON. But—Colombine—?

LÉANDRE. That charm for my eyes, that star which holds my heart in subjugation, that adorable tyrant to whom I say: Command, I obey!—

ORGON. Do you know what dowry I am giving her?

LÉANDRE. No.

ORGON. Do you prefer lands or cash?

LÉANDRE. Either one will content me.

ORGON. Cash is, I think better.

LÉANDRE. But of course, land does not vary as a cash income is likely to do.

ORGON. Now let me tell you: I intend to marry Colombine off without a dowry.—Save your sword and spare your tears for other amours.

LÉANDRE. (*Aside*) The devil! (*Aloud*) I adore her so, I care for nothing but her lovely self!

ORGON. Good.

LÉANDRE. With her, I could not hope to achieve a greater happiness on earth.

ORGON. You have money perhaps?

LÉANDRE. None with me.

ORGON. But—elsewhere? You have?

LÉANDRE. I? I have expectations: certain documents in my library lead me to believe that hypothetical——

ORGON. Why not speak of it, then? Shake hands! (LÉANDRE *appears very joyful*) But Colombine is not for you!

LÉANDRE. (*Aside*) What an obstinate old fellow he is!

ORGON. Now let us talk reason: do you imagine that I have gone to all the trouble and expense of bringing up this girl, and am now willing to allow her to be taken from me without receiving a single sou of what I have paid out?

LÉANDRE. A good father——

ORGON. I understand; a good father thinks himself sufficiently rewarded by the love of his children. I don't begrudge what I have given her, my dear Léandre, but I do intend that my son-in-law shall bring some money into the family.

LÉANDRE. And how much?

ORGON. I know you are an indigent young scamp, that your allowance is miserable; and I am willing to make a special offer: one hundred crowns. (*Aside*) He can never scrape together so much!

LÉANDRE. (*In consternation*) A hundred

crowns! I should have to hold up the Auxerre coach!

ORGON. Now, let us make an end to this. Here is my last word: a hundred crowns, or no marriage!

LÉANDRE. A hundred crowns!

ORGON. A hundred crowns. (ORGON *turns to go, but returns*)

LÉANDRE. Alas, fatal day! Where can I find such wealth? He might just as well have asked for a million. What can I do?

ORGON. (*Who has come to* LÉANDRE) Well, have you weighed well the offer?

LÉANDRE. (*Hesitating*) Seigneur——

ORGON. Only a hundred crowns.—A hundred crowns.—A hundred crowns.

LÉANDRE. (*Resolutely*) You will have them in no time.

ORGON. Until we meet again! (*Aside*) A good piece of business, this! (*He goes into his house*)

LÉANDRE. Under what celestial dome, in what hemisphere, can I unearth this heap of sun-bright crowns? What dark cave holds such a treasure?—My family? Hah! My friends? As well knock on a drum, or seek for flowers on a house-top! Friends are like an umbrella, one never has one when he needs it! But Colombine? I might ask her? I never hesitated before, and why should I now? I must show her that I am not ungrateful!

(COLOMBINE *comes gaily in.*)

COLOMBINE. How are you, my knight?

LÉANDRE. (*Aside*) Here is my money! (LÉANDRE *sits down on the bench and buries his face in his hands. He appears to be in dire despair*)

COLOMBINE. (*Wishing to show her dress to* LÉANDRE) Do you think I look nice? (LÉANDRE *does not move*) You might at least smile at me! Truly, I was only joking this morning, when I was

so rude to you. Come, make love to me. Do you still love your little Colombine?

LÉANDRE. (*Tragically*) Oh, cruel Destiny!

COLOMBINE. Are you still thinking of this morning? I tell you, it was only in fun.

LÉANDRE. Oh, what a misfortune! Terrible!

COLOMBINE. What is the matter? Have you seen my father?

LÉANDRE. (*Mechanically*) Your father?

COLOMBINE. Yes—tell me, I am so anxious to hear everything!

LÉANDRE. Alas, I have matters vastly more serious to think of than that!

COLOMBINE. Why do you wring your hands?

LÉANDRE. (*With an air of profound melancholy*) The wise man was right who said that life here below was one long martyrdom, and that an abyss was hidden in each of its thorny paths. (*Crying out*) A frightful abyss!

COLOMBINE. Heavens, this is terrible! What is the trouble?

LÉANDRE. (*With a long face*) I have a brother——

COLOMBINE. I didn't know that.

LÉANDRE. With lovely golden hair. I loved him so——

COLOMBINE. Is he dead?

LÉANDRE. (*Quietly*) No. (*In exaltation*) Oh, dread misfortune! We were as fingers to the hand——

COLOMBINE. Heavens, tell me!

LÉANDRE. What can I do, but throw myself into some deep pit?

COLOMBINE. But tell me——

LÉANDRE. I cannot.

COLOMBINE. Come now. This brother——

LÉANDRE. A good friend has written me this letter—(*He pretends to look for a letter*) which is drenched in my tears!

COLOMBINE. Well?

LÉANDRE. The poor boy lived in Messina. He was in love. One day, when he was far from his friends, and with the object of his affections, he went out in a boat. Far from shore, they were met by barbarian pirates——

COLOMBINE. And taken prisoners?

LÉANDRE. Exactly.—My poor nephew!

COLOMBINE. What nephew? I thought you said your brother?

LÉANDRE. No, it was my nephew.

COLOMBINE. Ah!

LÉANDRE. And the worst of it is, they took them to Tunis, I think, or one of the neighboring ports. My poor cousin, he lost an eye in the fray——

COLOMBINE. You said it was your nephew?

LÉANDRE. Did I? My grief makes me forget the details. When I am talking about Octave, I cannot be held responsible for such things.

COLOMBINE. I can well imagine!

LÉANDRE. And the way they treated him—(*Again looking for the letter*) I have the letter—where?—Well, they set him to work sawing wood on a barren rock——

COLOMBINE. How barbarous!

LÉANDRE. And no one would ransom him. Now, if I fail to get a hundred crowns in an hour's time, he will perish at the hands of the Turks——

COLOMBINE. He shall *not* perish! You may count on one true friend in your hour of need. When do you say you must have the money?

LÉANDRE. Immediately.

COLOMBINE. You shall have it, never fear.

LÉANDRE. (*Pretending not to have heard*) If necessary, I shall go myself to the coasts of Tunis. If I find the unfortunate couple lost——

COLOMBINE. No, no: saved!—Come back in an instant!

LÉANDRE. You insist, then?

COLOMBINE. (*Extending her hand to him*) Live!

LÉANDRE. (*Taking her hand and kissing it*) For your sake! (*He goes out*)

COLOMBINE. My father calls me good-for-nothing when I accept presents from lovers. Now at least he can't reproach me, for I'm going to give to this lover. Here comes my father! (ORGON *comes in and goes toward* COLOMBINE) How well you are looking to-day, Father!

ORGON. Yes.

COLOMBINE. You'll live at least two hundred years!

ORGON. I hope so.

COLOMBINE. What, now, would you say, if I—you are so obliging!—were to ask you to loan some money?

ORGON. Hm! Loan you money?

COLOMBINE. (*Smoothing* ORGON's *hair*) Your hair is so untidy!

ORGON. I'm not going to a ball. I think I look quite respectable. No, I'll never loan you money.

COLOMBINE. A hundred crowns?

ORGON. Ha! To enrich some good-for-nothing? Put it out of your mind this instant. I wouldn't give you a half-crown!

COLOMBINE. (*Gaily*) Oh, yes, you would!

ORGON. Nor five sous. Remember that.

COLOMBINE. I know where you have buried your treasure—in the garden—I'll go and unearth it.

ORGON. Spare yourself that trouble; it's under lock and key!

COLOMBINE. I understand your feelings, but let me tell you that this is a question of honor. If I told you it was a question of your own daughter's honor—a hundred crowns?

ORGON. I am a good father, and your honor is

dear to me above all else. Still, I shall keep my hundred crowns.

COLOMBINE. You could easily get them!

ORGON. Of course—to put them to better use. I can find them,—but I can keep them, too.

COLOMBINE. Listen to me: I always try to talk pleasantly and quietly with you, but you invariably interrupt me and make absurd excuses. (*She cries*) Then, I must throw myself into the Seine! I will, I will!

ORGON. You will be fished out.

COLOMBINE. Your white hairs will be ashamed of what I'll do.

ORGON. My white hairs have never blushed yet!

COLOMBINE. And I——

ORGON. Shh! I hear footsteps!

COLOMBINE. I *won't* hush! Tell me, who mends your clothes? Who tends the kitchen—?

ORGON. You, my dearest.

COLOMBINE. Ah!

ORGON. I realize how much I owe you, but——

COLOMBINE. I furnish a table for you like an ambassador's—and you give me next to nothing for doing all this! I beg and implore you, but you don't even pay for the dresses I wear!

ORGON. (*Anxiously*) Colombine, my dearest!

COLOMBINE. You never realized what I was worth!

ORGON. Oh, yes!

COLOMBINE. From now on I shall leave you to your valets!

ORGON. Pity me, my dear child!

COLOMBINE. They'll rob you, give you undercooked meats, bad wine——

ORGON. Oh, Colombine—my treasure, listen to me: you—you have persuaded me. I shall get you the money. (COLOMBINE *starts to speak, but* ORGON *interrupts her*) No! I don't want to know what you are going to do with it!

COLOMBINE. That would be wisest!

ORGON. (*Aside*) The audacity!

COLOMBINE. (*Aside*) Especially as I should never have thought of telling him!

ORGON. (*Aside*) Well, I'll give her the hundred crowns Léandre is to bring me!

COLOMBINE. (*Aside*) Thanks be to Cupid! Léandre is saved! (*Enter* LÉANDRE *at the back*) Here he is! Ah!

ORGON. (*Aside, as he catches sight of* LÉANDRE) Good!

COLOMBINE. (*To* ORGON, *as she offers her hand*) Father, give me the hundred crowns.

ORGON. (*To* COLOMBINE) At once! (*He motions to* LÉANDRE, *who comes close to him, and says, as he stretches forth his hand*:) My hundred crowns?

LÉANDRE. Of course—immediately.

COLOMBINE. (*To* ORGON) Then give them to me!

ORGON. (*To* COLOMBINE) Yes—(*To* LÉANDRE) Pray don't run away, I want my hundred crowns!

LÉANDRE. (*To* ORGON) Of course! I have them!

ORGON. (*To* LÉANDRE) Come, then!

LÉANDRE. (*To* ORGON) Never fear! (*He crosses over and stands by* COLOMBINE, *with outstretched hand*) The money?

COLOMBINE. (*To* ORGON) Give it to me.

ORGON. (*Who thinks* LÉANDRE *is still at his side*) Give it to me.

LÉANDRE. (*To* COLOMBINE) Well?

ORGON. (*As before*) Well?

LÉANDRE. (*As before*) Well?

COLOMBINE. (*As before*) Well?

ORGON. (*Bursting forth angrily*) God save me, where are my hundred crowns?

LÉANDRE. (*To* COLOMBINE, *aloud*) Where are yours?

COLOMBINE. (*To* ORGON) And where are yours?

ORGON. What is the matter with them? (*Aloud to* LÉANDRE) Did you not promise to bring me the money at once?

LÉANDRE. (*Aloud to* ORGON) The money I promised you——

COLOMBINE. (*Seeing how matters stand--to* ORGON) Is the money that you promised to give me.

ORGON. And I counted on him!

COLOMBINE. (*To* LÉANDRE) Then Messina--your brother Octave—the corsairs—?

LÉANDRE. Fairy-tales to win you!

ORGON. You are a pair of rascally swindlers! You both deserve my malediction.

COLOMBINE. Father—!

ORGON. (*Aside*) It's high time, though, my daughter was married. She'll wriggle from between my fingers like an eel, sooner or later. (*Aloud*) Marry then—money is not necessary for happiness.

LÉANDRE. (*Aside*) Then this marriage will be an affair of honor! (*Aloud to* ORGON) Monsieur Orgon, I know what it must cost you to be separated from so charming a daughter. You dislike, too, my easy manners and my shiftless mode of living. You have no good opinion of me. (*He pushes* COLOMBINE *into* ORGON'S *arms*) I give her back to you!

ORGON. (*To* LÉANDRE) Generous lover, she will be yours. (*He throws her into* LÉANDRE'S *arms*)

LÉANDRE. Keep her, I beg you, I have determined not to take her from you. I could not do it! (*He in turn sends* COLOMBINE *back to her father*)

ORGON. (*Returning her*) Nor I!

COLOMBINE. (*Disengaging herself*) If you please! You'll surely hurt yourselves. Really, your

fine sentiments are going a little too far! (*Aside to* LÉANDRE) Marry me, Léandre, and have done with all this. I know where my father's treasure is hidden. I'll tell you all about it.

LÉANDRE. I too know about it. My dear love!

COLOMBINE. (*To* ORGON) He accepts.

ORGON. Good; now I am satisfied. There is nothing so good and respectable as marriage.

COLOMBINE. Every one at last is——

LÉANDRE. Happy!

ORGON. (*To* LÉANDRE, *prophetically*) You will be! (*Pointing to his house*) Come, let us celebrate the event.

COLOMBINE. (*To the audience*) Mesdames and Messieurs, the play is over. If our poet has indulged in a trifle too boisterous gaiety, please remember that laughter is the true sign of our French commonsense!

CURTAIN.

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BARRETT H. CLARK

General Editor

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